

Eschenburg-Silva Cow Barn
3665 Pacheco Pass Road (State Highway 152)
Gilroy
Santa Clara County
California

HABS No. CA-2096

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Architectural and Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ESCHENBURG-SILVA COW BARN

HABS No. CA-2096

Location: 3665 Pacheco Pass Road (State Highway 152)
Gilroy, Santa Clara County, California

USGS San Felipe Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 10.634150.4094620

Present Owner: Tony Silva, 3665 Pacheco Pass Rd
Gilroy, CA 95020

Present Occupant: Tony Silva's cattle

Present Use: Barn

Significance: The Eschenburg-Silva cow barn is a relic of the dairy industry that flourished in southeastern Santa Clara county from the mid-nineteenth century. Its form - a long gable-roofed central bay flanked by low shed-roofed wings - is typical of cattle barns throughout central California. However, the twin cupolas are highly unusual. The barn was probably built for prominent Gilroy diaryman Rodney Eschenburg sometime before 1889.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Before 1889. Owner Rodney Eschenburg retired in that year and leased out his dairy operation.¹
2. Architect: None known.
3. Alteration and additions: Minor. Portions of the original earthen floor have been covered with concrete. Wooden shingles on the roof have been covered with (in part, replaced by) asphalt shingles and corrugated sheet metal. A network of electric wires on porcelain insulators was installed sometime early in this century.
4. Original and subsequent owners: In 1853 Rodney Eschenburg purchased 343 acres of the 13,000-acre San Ysidro ranch, possibly from Jose Quintin Ortega, whose title to this portion of the ranch was finally confirmed by the U.S. government in 1868.² Eschenburg's farm remained in the family for almost a century.³ His 343-acre parcel is substantially identical to the 347-acre tract of land hereinafter described (refernces are found in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Santa Clara County, California).

1947. Grant Deed--Joint Tenancy, November 1, 1947 (recorded December 9, 1947 in Official Records, book 1448, page 483). Georgia Eschenburg et al. to Fiori Silacci and Annie May Silacci, his wife, a 347.027-acre tract of land as shown in Maps, book 19, page 28 ("Record of Survey of the Eschenburg Ranch in the Rancho San Ysidro").
1959. Grant Deed--Joint Tenancy, October 8, 1959 (recorded October 9, 1959 in Official Records, book 4570, page 262). Wilbur F. Silacci and Evelyn Pearl Silacci, his wife, to Tony A. Silva and Isabel Silva, his wife, the easterly 190.345 acres of the 347.027-acre Eschenburg Ranch, as described.

B. Historical context:

The phenomenal growth of the fruit industry seems to have overshadowed the steady--if unspectacular--growth of dairy farming in the Santa Clara valley. Yet dairying has long played an important role in the valley's economy, particularly in the "south county" area near Gilroy. There, alfalfa could be readily grown on the valley floor, where artesian wells provided an abundant supply of water. And mushrooming population centers to the north provided a steady market for milk, butter, and--most especially--cheese.

The valley's Spanish and Mexican settlers, of course, were stock raisers almost to a man. But their cows "...were milked only for motherless babes."⁴ It was not until the arrival of the "forty-niners"--many of them from the Old Northwest and Middle Atlantic states--that the area's potential was realized. Santa Clara valley cheeses appeared on the San Francisco market as early as 1850. Ten years later, the federal census showed 7399 "milch cows" producing 222,212 pounds of butter and 181,105 pounds of cheese. By 1876, production of the latter had soared to over 500,000 pounds, and local observers reported that the country around Gilroy was "...devoted largely to dairying, a business which (had) assumed large proportions in this section."⁵

Growth continued throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, being especially rapid in the 1870s and again after 1900.⁶ Even as late as the 1920s--when the industry reached a peak of sorts in the face of urban expansion and the introduction of new, more intensive agricultural pursuits such as seed raising and truck farming--it was noted that the Gilroy area was still almost entirely "given over to dairying," and that "nearly every dairy (had) a large acreage of alfalfa and its own cheese factory."⁷

Rodney Eschenburg's career closely paralleled the rise of the dairy industry in Santa Clara County. He came to the gold regions of California from Illinois in 1849. Eschenburg met with only indifferent success, but mining profits were great enough to finance the purchase of 343 acres of farmland five miles east of Gilroy in 1853.

Like many of his neighbors--men from Illinois, Indiana, Ohio--Eschenburg turned to dairying, and over the course of the next three decades became "...one of the leading dairy farmers of the Santa Clara valley...whose progressive ideas influenced many in other parts of the county."⁸ He retired in 1889 and moved into town, where he acquired a degree of renown as the "last of Gilroy's forty-niners."⁹ Eschenburg died in 1921.

PART II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

Old views: None known.

Bibliography: Atlas Map of Santa Clara County, California (San Francisco: Thompson and West, 1876).

Arbuckle, Clyde, Santa Clara County Ranchos (San Jose: 1968).

James, William F., and George H. McMurry, History of San Jose, California (San Jose: Smith Printing Company, 1933).

Sawyer, Eugene T., History of Santa Clara County, California (Los Angeles: Historic Record Company, 1922).

Thollander, Earl, Barns of California (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1974).

Notes:

1. The barn's heavy redwood timber framing may indicate a much earlier date of construction, in fact.
2. Clyde Arbuckle, Santa Clara County Ranchos (San Jose: 1968), 34.
3. Eschenburg transferred ownership of the farm to the "Rodney Eschenburg Company" in 1908. In 1917 it became the property of his daughter, Madeline Ingraham, and his daughter-in-law, Georgia (Cobb) Eschenburg.
4. James and McMurry, History of San Jose, California (San Jose: 1933), 88.
5. Atlas Map of Santa Clara County, California (San Francisco: 1876), 12, 15.
6. For details of Santa Clara County's agricultural history, see James and McMurry, op. cit., 88, 108, 116, 126, 143, 159.
7. Eugene T. Sawyer, History of Santa Clara County, California (Los Angeles: 1922), 293.
8. Ibid., 383.

9. "Kin of Declaration of Independence Signer: Gilroy Bicentennial Link," San Jose News, February 20, 1976, 21. Eschenburg was descended from Caesar Rodney of Delaware.

Prepared by: Jeffrey S. Flemming
Project Historian
August 1980

PART III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This large wooden barn is typical of the barns in Santa Clara County, but unusual in the two cupolas on top.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all Dimensions: The three bay rectangular one story building is approximately eight-five feet by one-hundred feet.
2. Foundation: Concrete
3. Walls: The wide redwood board siding is vertical and has been painted red with a coat of white paint over the red, which is not flaking off, giving it a mottled effect.
4. Structural system, framing: Heavy redwood timber framing, post and beam, with diagonal knee braces between columns and from column to tie beam. Four rows of interior columns and a row on each outside wall.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: There is a large concrete slab extending across the width of the west end.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: On the east end there are eight large wooden sliding doors hung on a metal track. The doors are constructed of the vertical boards like the walls and have stiles and rails applied on the interior face. At each side of these doors is a pair of smaller sliding doors on metal tracks. On the west end there are two pair of large wooden sliding doors on each side of the central bay. The doors are the same as those on the east end. At each side of these doors, there is a doorway, but no doors.

- b. Windows and shutters: These are wooden panel sliding closures on small openings along the north and south facades of the barn. The panels have a wooden top and bottom track and have a vertical wooden member in the center on the inside as a handle. Above these openings are top-hinged large opening panels made of vertical wooden boards. In the gable end at the roof on the west facade is a large opening for loading hay. There is a metal track projecting from the interior with a large pulley on the end. At the east gable end is a similar, but smaller opening. There is a pair of closures that are top hinged on the rake and fold back against the ceiling on the interior.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: There is a large gable roof over the central structure with a steep pitch and a lesser pitch shed roof coming off this on each side. The original roof covering was wood shingles, which mostly remain, but the center roof and south shed are covered with asphalt shingles and the north shed roof is covered with corrugated sheet metal. There is a large rain hood on each end of the center gable projecting out over and protecting the hay doors.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Open eaves with a small overhang and wood fascia. The main gable roof overhangs the shed roofs approximately one foot.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: There are two wooden cupolas at third points on the ridge. Each has a hipped roof covered with asphalt shingles over wooden shingles and a boxed cornice. The face of each side has a wooden louver that has a raking head. On each side of the louver is a small inset wooden panel the length of the louver and having a raking head. On the north and south faces there is a horizontal recessed wooden panel under the side panels and louver. There are corner boards at the sides.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan

- a. First floor: The large open structure has four rows of columns down the length. On each side there is a concrete feeding trough extending this length of the barn. A wooden railing extends between the columns down the outer face. There is a wooden railing extending between the columns at the inner rows of columns. The side bay on each side has a concrete floor and there is a three foot strip of concrete flooring in each of the next bays. The central portion has an earthen floor. The walls and ceiling are exposed structure. There is a metal track extending the length of the barn along the ridge that has a traveling hay fork, consisting of four large steel tines on a wooden yoke.

2. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Electrical: There is a network of electric wires on porcelain insulators, but no electrical lighting fixtures.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The barn sits approximately twenty yards off the north side of State Highway 152, in an east-west orientation. There are wooden fences extending from the barn to the north and west forming the cow pens. To the west approximately one hundred yards is the main house. On the north side there are numerous wooden out buildings. There is a field on the east side, with a dirt road between the field and barn.

Prepared by: John P. White
July 1980

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service's National Architectural and Engineering Record in cooperation with the County of Santa Clara, California. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS and Kenneth L. Anderson, P.A., Principal Architect, the project was completed during the summer of 1980 at the HABS Field Office, Santa Clara, California by John P. White, Project Supervisor (Associate Professor of Architecture Texas Tech. University); David T. Marsh, Jr., Project Foreman (Howard University); Jeffery Flemming, Project Historian (University of Chicago); Jane Lidz, Architect/Photographer; and student Architects Kimberley E. Harden (Auburn University); Melody S. Linger (University of Florida); and Mathew Poe (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University).